

Quindel Report

By Supervisor Roger Quindel • Telephone 278-4259 • For 18th District Residents • Winter 2004 / 2005

Another Budget Squeeze

The County Board had difficult choices to make in the 2005 budget, but it maintained essential services with a "conservative" tax rate levy increase.

The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors recently approved a fiscally responsible County Budget for 2005 that retains vital programs and services. Despite rising costs, the County Board constructed a budget that does not require massive borrowing to fund employee pensions or the sale of huge amounts of County land to balance the budget, as proposed by the County Executive. The County Board was able to limit the overall tax levy to 2.9% above 2004.

The County Board reviewed the County Executive's Recommended Budget and made some key changes to help restore long-term fiscal responsibility to County finances. For instance, the County Executive proposed to borrow, through the use of pension obligation bonds, hundreds of millions of dollars to fund the County pension plan in hopes that investment returns would exceed the borrowing costs. The County Board chose not to include the pension obligation bond plan for three main reasons: the lack of detailed information about its significant risks, no actuarial study, and the need to change state law before the plan could be implemented.

Yet the County Executive also wanted to include the sale of more than \$11 million of County land to balance the operating budget for 2005. (*The County has only sold \$2.86 million in land this year.*). The County Board reduced the amount of "one-time" land sale revenue anticipated for 2005 to \$5 million to

better reflect the policy the County Executive put forth in the 2004 budget that "budgeting of land sales to support ongoing operations is not a recommended financial practice." This action reduces the pressure in future years to sell public lands, cut programs or raise taxes to balance the operating budget.

So far, the County Executive has not joined my efforts to control the excessive and rapid rise in area health care costs for county employees and retirees. Costs are projected to increase by **10.5%** (*almost FIVE times the rate of inflation*) for 2005. This means Milwaukee County will pay **\$10.67 million** more for health care costs than last year. I have been fighting to reduce the rise in health care costs in the Milwaukee area - costs that over the past twelve years have gone from below the Midwest average to the highest in the Midwest.

The 2005 Budget retains vital and popular County programs and services, from the Department on Aging that cares for the frail elderly, to our nationally recognized Zoological Gardens. The County Board also restored funding for UW-Extension programs and the Farm and Fish Hatchery Program at the House of Correction. This program provides much needed fresh produce to local food pantries and stocks fish in County Park lagoons for anglers of all ages to enjoy. Transit and paratransit riders will see no additional route cuts or fare increases for the first time in several years.

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A War Without End?

Like most Americans, I was horrified and outraged by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Something had to be done. Invading Afghanistan to root out Al Quaida and other terrorists and overthrow the Taliban government was an action directed at the heart of terrorism. The invasion and occupation of Iraq, however, had nothing to do with the fight against terrorism.

First, the war was supposedly about the "imminent" threat posed by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, who we were told had vast stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. There were no weapons of mass destruction to be found. Then we were told that the reason for the invasion was to get rid of Hussein because of what he might have done someday. Later we were told that the purpose of the Iraq War was to bring "freedom" to the Iraqi people. Fighting terrorism by treating it like a target of "conventional" warfare is costing us dearly: over \$200 billion in less than two years, with no end in sight. At the current rate, Wisconsin's payment for the war is almost \$4 billion dollars. Milwaukee County's share of the war is over \$800 million dollars.

More importantly, the death toll keeps rising. More than 1,200 Americans have been killed in combat, most of them since the invasion ended and the occupation began. At least 20,000 Americans have been injured, many so severely they will never lead normal lives again. Estimates of Iraqi dead from the effects of the war range up to 100,000 (in a country with 25 million citizens), the vast majority of them civilians. That is the equivalent of 1.1 million Americans being killed. We shouldn't be surprised that so many Iraqis have turned against the occupation despite their deep hostility against Saddam Hussein. We shouldn't be surprised that U.S. popularity has plunged to single digits in almost every Middle East country.

The Occupation of Iraq is Wrong and Isn't Working

There's no "winning" this war. We can't win by killing more of the people who are mad at us because of what we've done. We can't win this "war against terrorism" when our political leaders refuse to listen to the advice of our military leadership and the brave men and women who are serving in Iraq. Against the advice of the military, our political leadership:

- went to war with one-third of the troops requested;
- failed to ensure that all our troops had adequate equipment;
- completely disbanded the Iraqi military and allowed lawlessness to develop in Iraq;

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Sports Authority Offers Healthy Activities for Youth

Organized sports are good for kids. That simple idea is backed up by study after study that shows reduced rates of criminal and gang activity, drug and alcohol abuse, cigarette smoking and teen pregnancy among kids who are involved in organized sports. Youth who stick with sports do better in school, too.

With healthier lifestyles for Milwaukee's young people in mind, the Milwaukee County Sports Authority was formed to provide funding for volunteer-based sports groups that provide recreational outlets that features sports skills training hand-in-hand with life and social skills mentoring.

The Sports Authority offers children and teens a chance to develop as athletes in a wide variety of sports in settings all around Milwaukee. The program is open to all city residents and features a strong corps of volunteer adult coaches and mentors who provide instruction and guidance.

County Supervisor Roger Quindel has been involved with the Sports Authority from the start and serves as a youth coach and board member. He has fought for continued county funding of the Sports Authority. "Our investment in young people through the Sports Authority more than pays off in the long run," Supervisor Quindel said. "This program is one of the few around that really cuts into the high price we



pay when kids make poor lifestyle choices. Uniforms, equipment and structured sports leagues are very inexpensive compared to alternatives like jails and increased health care costs. And it's a lot more fun for everyone involved."

For information on the wide range of organized sports programs available in Milwaukee, or if you have a group that wants to be considered for a small sports grant, visit the web site at www.milwaukeeyouthsports.org (the web site will receive a major upgrade in the next two months) or call the Planning Council at (414) 224-0404.



It’s time to solve the goose problem

Milwaukee County has tried many ways to rid our parks of the ever-growing problem of goose droppings. In a few parks, like Brown Deer, dogs have had some effect in chasing off geese. Adding goose eggs, which involves spraying goose eggs with oil so they don’t hatch, has helped. However, these “urban” geese live a very long time compared to others and it is impossible to treat all of the eggs. Spraying the grass to eliminate droppings also helps, but it is costly.

The problem of goose droppings ruining our parks is still getting worse, so it’s time to solve it. A new method, actually harvesting the geese and taking them out of the parks so that they can be processed as food and then donated to food pantries, will start this June and July. County Supervisor Roger Quindel has repeatedly pushed for this \$50,000 initiative, for harvesting the geese and sponsored another \$50,000 for follow-up goose population control work.

This expense is minimal compared to how much goose droppings cost our parks system. Golf courses, walkways and playing fields are over-run by droppings, in some cases making them unsafe to use. The droppings cause serious erosion of river and pond banks. Goose feces dirty lagoons so badly that they are disgusting. And it’s just plain unhealthy for children and adults to walk and play and enjoy our parks in an environment dominated by goose feces.

“We Can’t Live With This Any More”

There are as many as 300 geese living in some of our county parks. Thousands countywide call the parks home. These geese are twice as big as geese that live in the non-urban wild, and they don’t migrate. But migrating geese join them each year, making the droppings problem even worse.

Amazingly, the average “County Parks Goose” drops 3.5 pounds of fecal matter each and every day. “We just can’t live with this any more,” said Supervisor Quindel.

The harvest of geese will take place during the months that the geese are molting and do not fly. Capturing geese and using the harvest to feed the hungry has worked well in other places. “As someone who coaches kids in our parks, I know that you shouldn’t have to bring buckets of water and wipes along just to get the fecal matter off of their hands and shoes,” said Supervisor Quindel.

“My Simba Lions soccer club had to move from Washington Park to Lincoln Park just to find a clean field to play on, and we’re sure not the only ones who’ve been forced out by the geese. Every county park user is affected by this problem. It’s not funny. It’s filthy. But we are going to solve this problem this coming year!”

A War Without End?

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- encouraged the abuse of prisoners at Abu Graib;
- failed to use to reconstruction dollars to put Iraqis to work; and
- failed to restore the Iraqi electrical, water and sewerage systems.

The same poor political leadership ignores the reality of Iraq that the rest of the world, particularly the Arab world, sees:

- the shooting of unarmed prisoners;
- troops attacking mosques while religious services are being conducted;
- destroying cities to save them; and
- arresting clerics because we don't like what they say.

Patriotism?

Where is the patriotism in giving private companies like Halliburton obscene profits for providing security and rebuilding services in a country that our actions and failed leadership have made less secure and destroyed in the first place? What kind of patriotism creates a perfect environment for terrorists to flourish? Where is the patriotism in making sure that the only Iraq industry that still works as it did before the occupation is the oil industry, so that Americans can continue to drive gas-guzzling SUVs and Hummers with impunity?

As County Supervisor, I see the impact of local and national budget cuts every day. Yet we can somehow find a way to increase the national debt by a 1.4 trillion dollars to fund a war, at the same time giving tax cuts to the richest among us.

It doesn't make sense to wage war and ask for no sacrifice on the part of most Americans. Ironically, the average American is sacrificing plenty -- in the lives and health of our courageous soldiers, in dollars and in the lost respect of most of the people of the world.

Our country needs to fight terrorism directly, not pretend that Iraq is part of that fight. Fifteen of the nineteen 9/11 murderers were from Saudi Arabia; none were from Iraq. Our country needs a sensible energy policy that decreases our reliance on foreign oil and does not depend on military force. The technology already exists to drastically reduce our reliance on foreign oil and the brutal dictators that we prop up when we pay for it. Our country needs political leadership that tells the truth before it puts our young people in harm's way. Our country needs political leadership that is properly equipping our wartime military; ending the immoral "stop-loss policy" (soldiers not allowed to leave when their active duty service obligation is up) and ensuring that all veteran benefits are fully funded.

And, we need to get U.S. troops out of Iraq as close to immediately as possible. We aren't "winning" by doing things the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld way, and neither are the people of Iraq.

--Roger Quindel, a combat veteran of the Vietnam War, is a life member of the Disabled American Veterans

Another Budget Squeeze


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The 2005 Budget contains total expenditures of \$1.18 billion and a property tax levy of \$225.8 million. The 2.9% increase in the tax levy (the total amount of County taxes raised) for 2005 is significantly less than the increase in new

construction (new taxable properties) plus the rate of inflation, which totals 3.9%. The property tax rate per \$1,000 of equalized value is \$4.54, which is a *decrease* of 22 cents per \$1,000 from 2004. For the past three years the annual tax levy rate has increased less than 1% per year.

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Thalidomide: One drug says a lot about health care costs

You may remember thalidomide. This powerful drug was taken off the market in the 1960s when it was discovered that it caused severe birth defects and other problems when pregnant women took it.

Now thalidomide is back, and how its price has changed says a lot about why health care costs in general continue to go through the roof. First, thalidomide was shown to be an effective treatment for leprosy, which still affected millions of people mostly in “underdeveloped” countries. For lepers in those areas, it was made available for 7 cents a dose.

Thalidomide was then added to the mix of drugs used to fight AIDS. For that use, the price went up to \$2.50 a dose.

Then, as thalidomide showed promise in treating certain cancers in “developed” countries like the U.S., the cost of a dose went to \$12.50 and now sits at \$25 a dose.

Enormous Profits at Our Expense

That’s a simplified version of the thalidomide-marketing story, but the clear fact is that under-regulated drug manufacture and distribution allows pharmaceutical companies to reap enormous profits at our expense. The system allows pricing at “whatever the market will bear,” so prescription drugs are sold in the U.S. at prices that don’t always reflect the actual cost of production.

“In short, we’re being gouged on prescription drug costs and those costs are driving up taxpayer-funded health care costs, too,” said County Supervisor Roger Quindel. “I will continue to push to change the law so that Milwaukee County residents can legally purchase drugs from other countries like Canada with adequate safeguards.

“And we’ll keep working to find the least expensive drug purchase options for prescriptions provided through Milwaukee County health care programs.”

Controlling health care costs isn’t limited to just reining in the price of drugs, Supervisor

Quindel said. In the past twelve years, the Milwaukee area has gone from 14th in health care costs to 1st in the entire Midwest. Milwaukee County is having trouble finding and keeping nurses for its health care programs because it is impossible to pay the prevailing hourly wage under current budget constraints.

Health Care Tax Share Doubled in Five Years

“The health care system should be designed to provide quality care at reasonable profit levels, not limited care at obscene profit levels,” said Supervisor Quindel. “No other country in the entire industrialized world allows the health care to be treated as just another commodity to be bought and sold at maximum profit. In all other countries citizens are guaranteed the right to adequate health care.”

The U.S. has the world’s highest health care costs (double those of many of our European counterparts) yet we rank 37th in the quality of our citizens’ health. Problems such as obesity, irresponsible sexual behavior and drug use are seen as great opportunities for medical care growth. So-called non-profit health care executives routinely pay themselves million of dollars in salaries and bonuses because they have generated massive revenue growth. But the health care industry’s revenue growth is also the property taxes of government and the high cost of production for area manufacturers and businesses.

For example, Milwaukee County’s health care costs (your property tax dollars) have doubled in the last five years. This year alone Milwaukee County’s health care cost increases were far more than the entire increase in property taxes levied. Yet Aurora continues to fight to build unnecessary and redundant health care facilities all across the state knowing that the cost of these unneeded facilities will just be buried in the double-digit rate increases they will push onto the backs of over-burdened taxpayers, companies and individuals. Our country needs a universal, national health care sysetm.

—Roger Quindel

Juvenile Justice Initiatives Save Lives and Money

Massive changes made to the juvenile justice system in the past decade are really paying off, as fewer kids are entering the system. More importantly, fewer of them are becoming serious chronic juvenile offenders, which is a virtual guarantee that they will be long-time adult criminal offenders. Also the juvenile crime rate is dropping in Milwaukee.

Milwaukee County has gone from 900 juveniles in correctional facilities and residential treatment centers a decade ago to a projected 240 this year. It costs \$68,000 to \$90,000 *per year* to keep a juvenile offender in custody. The recidivism rate for these facilities was extremely high yet no one seemed to analyze the poor results. Alternative programs were developed which are far less costly, far more effective and involved the family of the juvenile far more extensively.

Today these alternative programs and preventive programs keep more juveniles on the right track and not only improve our quality of life, they save taxpayers tens of millions of dollars annually.

A variety of initiatives presented by County Supervisor Roger Quindel have played a role in this success. From a bigger emphasis on schooling at the County-run Juvenile Detention Center and cleaning up the graffiti there, to day treatment programs and other alternatives to incarceration, changes in the juvenile justice system have been a priority for Supervisor Quindel.

“We still have a long way to go,” Supervisor Quindel said. “There are still far too many juveniles entering the justice system, and the juvenile crime rate is still simply unacceptable. “But by staying on top of the issue and finding ways to keep kids out of the system at the ‘front end’ of their lives, we can literally save lives and money.”

Getting a Handle on Pension and Sick Leave Costs

When I was asked by the Chair of the County Board to chair the Personnel Committee, I knew it would be a difficult and thankless job. If you remember (who doesn’t?) the pension scandal of four years ago, though, you know how important it is and what a fix we’re in. The enormous increases in pension and sick leave payouts approved then by the County Board were the result of lack of oversight. A lot of people simply didn’t do their job. We didn’t ask for the information we needed before our votes, and we didn’t get it, and we’re all to blame. And even those not on the governing committees who did ask questions were lied to by the administration.

Now, as Personnel chair, I am committed to getting intimate knowledge of the pension system spread across the County Board and to getting the true, actual costs of all future labor contracts. I’ve always been an advocate for working people and believe that the over-

whelming majority of County workers do a great job for the people of Milwaukee. But I will not support any future contracts that do not include rollbacks of the gigantic lump sum pension and sick leave payouts.

This position will help protect the services that the County provides, retain the workers still with us, and maintain the tax rate.

Can’t Afford the “Backdrop”

The County can’t afford the current “backdrop” payments made to employees when they retire that include very high rates of added interest calculated backwards so that the backdrop pension payments double every 6.5 years.

County Executive Walker did not support this position initially. He wanted no backdrop payments for new employees, but left it in place for current employees. Negotiating contracts that way means that the taxpayers will

get no relief from the expensive backdrops for another 30 years.

As it is, 55% (those hired after 1993) of current County employees will get no health insurance coverage when they retire and their sick leave payouts can only be used to buy health insurance. That number grows every year. I believe that all workers deserve a decent pension and health care coverage after many years of service, but there are also limits on the price that taxpayers are being asked to bear.

The County needs a labor contract that restricts the number of backdrop years counted forward or the interest counted backward when calculating pension and sick leave payouts. This year’s drain on the County for doing things the wrong way is about \$55 million. Doing things the right way will, in the long run, make these payments cost-neutral for the pension plan.

—Roger Quindel

IN THE NEWS . . .

Child welfare...

County Supervisor Roger Quindel, who serves on the Child Welfare Partnership Council whose job is to oversee the child welfare system, expressed dismay over the continuing changes the system has undergone since the state took it over.

Instability has marked the agencies providing services to abused and neglected children, Quindel observed, adding that the system already has an unusually high turnover in case managers.

“Now here we have another turnover and another management team and another shake-up for these poor families,” he said. “My concern is the children, because I don’t think they’re getting what they need.”

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - December 7, 2004

I wish (Doyle) well, because it needs to get done,” said Milwaukee County Supervisor Roger Quindel. “If he’s willing to do battle with the Legislature, that’s great.”

Quindel and Thompson said about one in four foster care children in Milwaukee County do not see physicians as often as they should, and 40% of them do not get adequate dental care - problems they believe Doyle’s proposals could help correct.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - May 4, 2004

Pension fund borrowing...

Walker said later that the pension scandal was a reason to commit to the borrowing plan, not oppose it. His plan involves paying off much of the unfunded liability of the pension fund. The deal could wind up saving taxpayers some of the cost of the pension enhancements, he said.

But as Supervisor Roger Quindel pointed out, if the return on the borrowed funds falls short of expectations, the deal could wind up adding to those same costs.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - November 17, 2004

Controlling future costs...

Editorial:

Milwaukee County taxpayers had every right to be furious when they found out a few years ago that county supervisors had unwittingly agreed to a lucrative pension-sweetening deal for county employees. But their anger would be even more justified if they thought county officials had not pursued every possible remedy, even at this late date.

And that’s precisely what Supervisor Roger Quindel, chairman of the County Board’s Personnel Committee, has in mind. Quindel, interested in atoning for his vote on the pension deal, is wisely pushing for the county to try to enact reasonable pension limits to save taxpayers money and to save the jobs of vital county employees.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - October 9, 2004

Supporting public participation...

After the meeting, a committee member, Supervisor Roger Quindel, said of Walker, “It’s a notice to him that you can’t do this” without consulting the board.

Quindel said Walker has established a pattern of sidestepping the board and making decisions unilaterally. “Our dialogue permits the public to be involved,” Quindel said.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - June 17, 2004

Crime pays! ...

It proves white-collar crime pays,” said County Supervisor Roger Quindel, who voted for the plan but has blamed Dobbert for misleading him. “If you help loot tens of millions of dollars through lies and deception, that’s a rather modest price to pay.”

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - March 21, 2004

Adoptions...

A decade ago, the annual number of adoptions in the child welfare system hovered under 40, according to Roger Quindel, chairman of the Milwaukee County Child Welfare Partnership Council. Meanwhile, cases in which birth parents are stripped of their parental rights have more than doubled, from 273 in 2000 to 650 in 2002.

‘A real wake-up call’

“The fact that we’re adopting so many kids has a negative side,” Quindel said. “I think it’s a great thing for the children and families who get permanence, but it should be a real wake-up call that we have some kids coming from difficult circumstances.”

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - November 21, 2004

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